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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 009717

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KMPI](#) [KPAL](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: GOJ PUSHES 'AMMAN MESSAGE' ON ISLAM

REF: A. AMMAN 9152

[1](#)B. AMMAN 7752

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (U) Following the GOJ roll-out of the "Amman Message" last month denouncing political abuse of Islam, the Jordanian government has taken steps to show it is serious about promoting a mainstream religious message. In addition to patronizing two large conferences on Islam, the King has increased funds for the resource-poor Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs to enhance training programs for mosque preachers, increase the salaries for imams, and build a new Ministry headquarters. The King also has donated funds to build a new Sharia secondary school outside of Amman. End Summary.

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SPREADING THE MESSAGE  
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[1](#)2. (U) The GOJ has taken steps in recent weeks to show it is serious about implementing the "Amman Message," a declaration delivered by Jordan's top Islamic authorities last month that rejected religious extremism and terrorism in favor of moderation and tolerance (ref a). On November 28, King Abdullah opened the "International Preaching and Guidance Conference," organized by the Awqaf Ministry, which featured prominent Muslim scholars -- including the ministers of Awqaf from Saudi Arabia and Egypt -- to discuss, among other topics, a possible "code" for preaching. Awqaf Minister Ahmad Hilayel said the conference is part of Jordan's "relentless efforts" to present the rest of the world with "the true picture of Islam," stressing that "our talk of tolerance and moderation in Islam is based on foundations of strength and self-respect rather than weakness and fear." The day before, Yarmouk University hosted a separate three-day conference (also in cooperation with the Awqaf Ministry and patronized by the King) called "Islam and Muslims in the 21st Century," which was supported through PASA funds approved by post's MEPI committee to support dialogue and moderate Islam.

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AWQAF MINISTRY GAINS NEW RESPECT  
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[1](#)3. (U) The GOJ's strategy has breathed new life into the resource-poor and overshadowed Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and appears to have opened GOJ coffers as well. During a visit to the Ministry shortly after Jordan's chief Qadi Sheikh Izeddin Tamimi delivered the Amman Message, the King promised the "required funds" from the 2005 budget to implement an ambitious list of new projects: educational programs for mosque imams and preachers, the building of mosques and shrines dedicated to the sahaba (the Prophet Mohammad's companions), investment in waqf (religious endowments), and zakat (religious charity) programs. He ordered that the Awqaf Ministry raise the salaries of mosque imams by 30 percent, and that mosque caretakers receive a ten percent raise.

[1](#)4. (U) The King also announced the establishment of the King Abdullah II Institute for Qur'anic Studies, and authorized the relocation of the Ministry early next year to a new headquarters at a cost of JD 3.5 million. In addition, the Awqaf Ministry is budgeting to build a fifth minaret for the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. In keeping with the plans, the Ministry opened a training workshop for preachers this week focusing on population challenges, reproductive health, and family planning.

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TAKING THE MESSAGE BEYOND AMMAN  
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[1](#)5. (U) The King is taking the message (and his checklist) beyond Amman. During a visit last month to Salt, west of the capital, the King announced he would donate funds to build a new modern Sharia secondary school that is in keeping with his goal of institutionalizing a moderate approach to Islam. The new school, overseen by the Ministry of Awqaf but

affiliated with the Ministry of Education, would replace the overcrowded Imam Ali Bin Abu Taleb Sharia Comprehensive School in Salt, one of only four in Jordan that complements its regular courses of Arabic, English, and math, with an Islamic curriculum, including Qur'anic studies, Hadith (teachings of the prophet), and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Demand for entry into the 14-year old school is high, in part because it is tuition-free. The majority of graduates continue at a religious two-year college (also supervised by the Awqaf Ministry), which graduates imams and mosque preachers.

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MP: TWENTY YEARS LATE?  
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16. (C) The impact of the GOJ's strategy remains to be seen. The revival of traditional Islam around the world -- and the parallel growth of newer radicalisms -- have been linked in Jordan with growing frustration over regional and domestic problems, giving rise to a new generation that is notably more conservative than its elders (ref b). Member of Parliament Suleiman Abu Ghaith, a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood whose constituency includes the residents of the Palestinian refugee camp in Madaba, told Poloffs that the "Amman Message" is a good idea, but it would have been more effective had it been implemented 20 years ago.

17. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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HENZEL